

## CHAPTER 12

# PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should:

- Know how to recognize when a certified applicator must be present during an application from information provided on the label or by regulations.
- Understand the importance of keeping records of pesticide training for uncertified individuals.
- Assure that an uncertified individual that you supervise can understand and follow application procedures.
- Understand the importance of providing detailed guidance for pesticide applications that you supervise.
- Know your responsibilities in supervising uncertified individuals.
- Understand the importance of explaining appropriate federal and state laws and regulations to uncertified individuals that you supervise.
- Know how to communicate with customers and explain realistic expectations of pesticide applications.
- Know how to describe notification procedures for customers and neighbors prior to applications (e.g., chemical sensitivity registries, restricted-entry instructions, postapplication requirements).
- Know how to provide labels and material safety data sheets upon request.
- Know how to provide notification and signage required by laws and regulations for the duration of restrictions.
- Know how to address or refer public inquiries about pests and pesticide applications.



**W**ebster's dictionary defines "professionalism" as the "conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person." Many factors have an influence on the professional conduct

of pesticide applicators. It is important that certified pesticide applicators understand the rules and regulations on supervising uncertified employees and know how to train employees in proper

pest control techniques. Implementing proper training and pesticide security measures assist the pesticide application business in establishing and maintaining a professional image. People are quite concerned about the safety and health effects associated with pesticides. Therefore,

it is extremely important to be able to communicate with customers effectively, accurately, and in a professional manner about the nature of the pest problem, the chemical and non-chemical means to prevent and control pests, and the risks involved if a pesticide is used.

## SUPERVISION

**“U**nless otherwise prescribed by its labeling, a pesticide shall be considered to be applied under the direct supervision of a certified applicator if it is applied by a competent person acting under the instructions and control of a certified applicator who is available if and when needed, even though such certified applicator is not physically present at the time and place the pesticide is applied” (FIFRA, Sec. 2 (e)(4)).

This section in FIFRA establishes the minimum federal standard for direct supervision of uncertified individuals. Some states require a certified applicator to be physically present at the application site

whenever an uncertified individual applies a restricted-use pesticide. Some states require the certified applicator to perform the application while other states require the certified applicator to be present during the application of any pesticide (i.e., both restricted-use and unclassified-use). The supervising certified applicator is responsible for the actions of the uncertified person throughout the entire application process—i.e., mixing, application, cleanup, and disposal. In some cases, product labels may restrict the use of certain pesticides to certified applicators only. In such instances, an uncertified applicator may assist the certified person, but the actual application must be performed by the person certified in the appropriate pest control category.

The phrase “under the direct

supervision of” means the act or process whereby the handling and application of a pesticide is made by a “competent person” acting under the instructions and control of a certified applicator. The key words are “competent person.” In this context, competency is defined as being properly qualified to perform functions associated with a pesticide application.

It is essential for supervisors to prepare and train each uncertified person to independently handle and apply pesticides in a responsible manner. Uncertified applicators need to be every bit as professional as their certified colleagues. It is important that uncertified persons understand basic information such as:

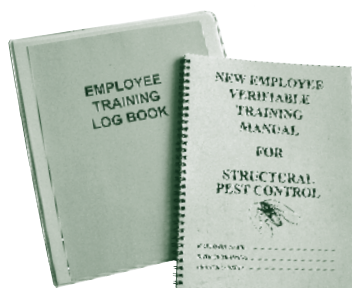
- Federal and state pesticide laws and regulations.
- Security and emergency procedures in the event of an incident.
- The importance of carefully following all label instructions.
- Knowledge about the pesticides and application equipment to be used and the pests to be controlled.
- The proper use of all personal protective equipment.
- The need to keep accurate and precise application records.
- The need to communicate regularly with the certified supervisor.

Proper supervision is not merely a single instructional event but rather a continuing educational process. Maintaining good training records helps to assure management that training



Tom Delaney, Professional Landcare Network

*Supervision requires continual interaction between the supervisor and the employee.*



throughout the employee's career is timely and relevant. Supervision requires

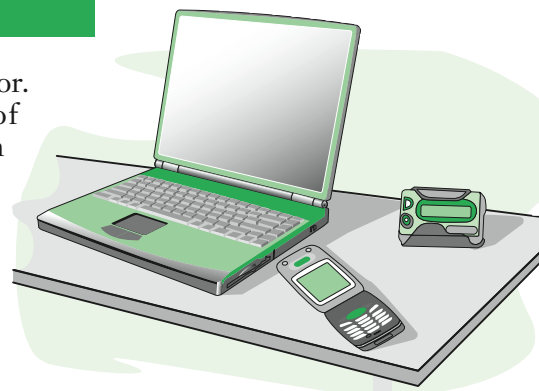
continual interaction between the supervisor and the uncertified person.

## PESTICIDE SECURITY AND SUPERVISION

**P**esticide security has the mission of protecting people, facilities, and the environment from harm. In pesticide certification and training, pesticide security is about allowing access to pesticides only by competent persons. Pesticide security is important for all pesticide distributors, retailers, and end users, including uncertified individuals. Supervisors, as well as those persons being supervised, must be knowledgeable about security procedures. Develop a formal written security plan that includes well-defined communication procedures between

the supervisor and the applicator.

Given the availability of today's modern communication technologies—such as cell phones, pagers, and remote Internet access—maintaining frequent contact between the certified applicator and the uncertified staff need not be a problem. Such technologies permit immediate contact. No pesticide applicator, certified or uncertified, should be without such communication devices today.



*Use all of today's communication devices to maintain frequent contact between supervisors and uncertified staff.*

## PUBLIC AND CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS

**T**he importance of professionalism to a successful business cannot be overstated. A professional person or company must strive for excellence. Professionalism deals not only with how you and your equipment look but also with how you deal with other employees, customers, the public, and, in some cases, the media. This can all be summed up as “your professional image.”

Professionalism includes continuing education, keeping up with current pesticide regulations, knowing enough to ask for outside help when you do not have all the answers, knowing the safety and environmental aspects of the job, and taking the initiative to communicate with your customers. What the public hears from the receptionist, technician, and pesticide applicator helps form their opinion of the company as much as do the final results.

Pesticide applicators must never give their customers or other members of the public the impression the pesticide products they use are “safe” or imply the products or services they offer are “safer” than those used by other companies. Creating a professional image begins with the vocabulary used by employees. It is important to use terminology about pests and pesti-

cides the public can understand. Never use phrases such as “environmentally friendly,” “safe,” “safe for children and pets,” “safer,” and “harmless” when referring to pesticide products or to the services offered by a pesticide applicator. Also, avoid using the terms “organic,” “natural,” or “least toxic” because these terms lack a common definition and are likely to confuse your customers. Pesticide applicators must not refer to EPA- and state-registered products as “EPA-approved” or “state-approved.” Such references can give the public the impression no risks are associated with the use of the pesticide products and these agencies endorse, approve, or recommend the use of particular products.

Acceptable terminology may include describing the product as “reduced risk” and/or “less toxic.” Explain to the customer why the risk is reduced when compared with use of a higher toxicity product. Also explain whether the product requires more applications to be as effective. Provide customers information packets that explain the risks associated with the pesticide (this may include additional information from labels or MSDS).

It is important for pesticide applicators and pest management specialists



*Always communicate to customers the risks associated with a pesticide and provide them with additional information.*

to spend time with each customer explaining *what* needs to be done and *why*. Show customers how environmental, cultural, and physical factors can contribute to ongoing pest problems. For example, moisture, humidity, planting site, sanitation, improper plant selection, and ineffective barriers all may play a role in pest outbreaks. Do not merely tell the customer what you are spraying for but rather show the customer the problems. Defining the *what* and *why* includes explaining product selection, how it is to be used, and anticipated results. Be factual and, above all, do not exaggerate the results your customer can expect from the treatment. Inform the customer about any postapplication label instructions, such as reentry restrictions, watering in a pesticide, or livestock grazing or feeding prohibitions, whether in the field, the garden, or a structure.


Some states have mandatory **preapplication notification** requirements for customers or neighbors. These include chemical hypersensitivity registries currently enforced in about a dozen states. Be sure to let your customers know if the neighbors have requested notification and if there are any concerns or objections involving the use of pesticides. At a minimum, prior notification to concerned individuals should include:

1. Date and address of the scheduled application.
2. Name and telephone number of the applicator.
3. The applicator's certification/license number, where applicable.

State laws and regulations may differ from these minimum notification requirements. Therefore, pesticide applicators must know what their state's specific notification requirements are before making an application.

Regulations in some states may require you to provide copies of labels

and MSDS at the time of application. Such requirements usually involve applications around residential, school, and recreational property but rarely agricultural areas. States and other governmental entities may also require **posting** of the treated site immediately following a pesticide application, especially when the application is made to residential and golf course turf, landscape areas, ornamental plants, school property, or public access areas, or around the perimeter of structures. A number of states now have school integrated pest management (IPM) programs that require notification of school staff members and parents and posting of treated areas. Even in states where these requirements do not exist, companies often post notices at entry points to recently treated areas. This usually involves placing a small plastic flag or sign in a conspicuous place to alert people to avoid the treated area at least until the spray has dried



**DO NOT ENTER AREA**  
**NO ENTRE AREA**

**WARNING**  
Pesticide Treated Area

**ADVERTENCIA**  
Area Tratada Con Pesticida

Location Treated / Room(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Pesticide / Nombre del Pesticida: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Application / Fecha de la Aplicación: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information / Información: \_\_\_\_\_

**KEEP OUT UNTIL DRY**  
**NO ENTRAR HASTA SECO**

This sign may be removed on / Este signo se puede quitar en: \_\_\_\_\_

University of Florida

*An example of a school pesticide application notification sign.*

thoroughly. Check with your state, tribe, territory, or other pesticide regulatory agency to make sure you are in compliance with any posting requirements.

To maintain good customer and public communications, consider keeping more detailed records than required by federal and state laws. Records can prove invaluable as documentation in the event of a



complaint or a lawsuit against your business. Pesticide records provide all the necessary information about the pesticides and how they were actually applied, thus protecting the applicator from what may be false accusations. Additional information could include weather, nozzle sizes, spray pressures, ground speed, calibration, or any other special precautions that may have been used or taken. Records can also help determine which pesticide treatments work, which treatments do not work, and why.

Record-keeping is also a major tool of IPM by documenting pest sightings and population levels, pest control techniques used, and overall environmental conditions. Good records enable an applicator to make more informed pest control decisions. If medical treatment for a pesticide injury is required for humans or animals, records can provide information necessary to the medical staff for diagnosis and treatment. Good records can also document the steps that were taken to protect farm workers and the environment from pesticides. Records may also be used to respond to the public's concern regarding pesticide use.



*Consider keeping more detailed pesticide records than required by federal and state laws.*

## How to Answer Consumer Questions

Today, customers and other concerned individuals are likely to ask the pesticide applicator, the sales representative, or the service technician

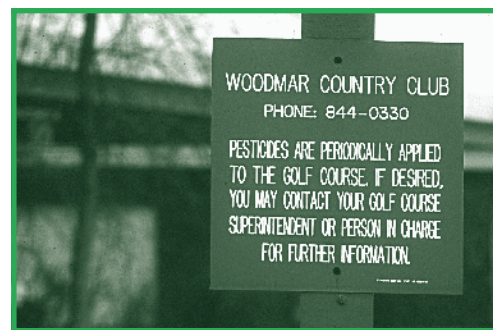
about the products that will be used to manage their pest problems. They may ask about possible effects on children, pets, property, the environment, and themselves. How you answer these questions can determine whether you have a satisfied customer. Preparing yourself and your staff to answer consumer concerns is the professional approach. A good way to familiarize every pesticide applicator and technician in the company with typical questions and answers is to discuss these during company training sessions. Role playing by the staff members can help reinforce correct and responsible responses. If requested by the customer or anyone else inquiring about pesticides, provide Web addresses and 800 phone numbers for pesticide emergencies and for pesticide information. For emergencies, contact the National Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222. For pesticide information, contact the National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) at 1-800-858-7378 (<http://npic.orst.edu>). Also, when requested by your customer or other concerned individuals, be prepared to provide the trade and common names of the pesticides and copies of the product labels and MSDS.

**National Poison Control Center  
1-800-222-1222**

**National Pesticide Information Center  
(NPIC) 1-800-858-7378**

## Your Professional Image

It takes work to achieve and maintain a professional image. As a representative of your pest management company, seek to reinforce a positive company image. Remember, your work actions reflect on your company and on the entire pest management industry. Be sure to leave a positive impression.



Purdue Pesticide Programs

*Posting a sign about pesticide applications helps promote good customer relations.*

## SUMMARY

**C**ertified applicators often supervise and instruct uncertified individuals. The minimum standard for supervision of pesticide applications is detailed under FIFRA. According to FIFRA, certified applicators do not necessarily have to be physically present during the application. Certified applicators, however, must be aware of any state laws or label requirements that have stricter standards.

To perform pesticide applications properly, uncertified individuals need adequate training and supervision to become competent at their task. Supervisors must be able to communicate effectively with employees as well as customers and the public. Both

certified and uncertified employees must be able to address consumer questions clearly and accurately. It is a violation of the federal pesticide law to misrepresent the safety and efficacy of any pesticide. Applicators must also be aware of and follow up on any preapplication notifications or posting of treatment sites required by their state.

Properly training employees, enforcing security procedures, communicating effectively, and adhering to federal and state pesticide laws all contribute to a professional image. Looking and acting professional enhances consumer confidence in the pest management industry.